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1. Why should I Apply, and What Happens?

Why should I apply to festivals?

Film Festivals are a sure way to have your work seen by other filmmakers, media professionals, and by people/businesses/groups that love films and want to support the practice. You'll have your work put into a passionate and dedicated environment that is all about what's new and creative in your field of practice.

Examples of what you can expect to take place:

- There's an impressive collection of curated, brand new animation that you get to binge watch
- New and old animation filmmakers are attending
- Filmmakers and media professionals will meet each other and make friends (if you also make the effort)
- You're building your national and international network
- The energy and passion for filmmaking suffuses the festival, and is really inspiring

Examples of what *can* take place:

- Competition screenings means that there are Awards (variations of money, physical awards, certificates, or verbal announcement)
- People want to meet you because they saw your film
- Your film does well, and wins an award!
- Creative studio recruiters and producers attend the large festivals so they can scout out new talent

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- Other festival programmers see your film and send you an invitation to participate in their festival
- Distributors see your film and propose a representation or distribution deal
- Your film does well, you meet a producer at the festival, and they suggest proposing something to their studio
- Local news coverage runs a piece that includes something about your film and you

Who goes to festivals?

Hopefully, you will! It's a truly inspiring experience to have your own creative work in festivals, and especially to also attend in person.

- Other filmmakers: independent, studio, student, famous, and the not-famous-yet (all festivals)
- Festival programmers from other festivals (major and medium festivals)
- Studio reps, producers, arts funders (major festivals)
- Film fans, curious general public, arts-friendly people (all festivals)

What happens at festivals?

- The larger festival includes screenings (a week long +), talks, workshops, parties, and awards (money and physical). People from around the world attend. An example is the Canadian [Ottawa International Animation Festival](#).
- The medium festivals include screenings (maybe a week long) and awards (certificates), maybe filmmaker talks, maybe a party. Attendees are regional, and possibly with some international.
- The small festivals include screenings (a day to a week long), maybe filmmaker talks, maybe awards. Attendees are usually locals and some regionals.

How do I afford this? It sounds expensive...

- Apply to festivals that have little or no application fees
- Apply in the traditional "Early Bird" phase for each festival, because application fees are significantly lower
- A festival that accepts your film will almost always give you a free pass to attend the entire festival, or at least your screening
- If your film is in the Official Competition level, many major festivals can provide you with a place to stay
- Are you connected to other students or filmmakers that are also attending? Sometimes people share accommodations.
- Is there a good quality hostel in the area? These are low-cost accommodations, and have varying things that they provide.
- Biggest costs: You have to take care of your travel there and get back, and your food/transit needs while there

2. What's the commitment?

The length of time and the amount of work invested in this process depends on what your goals are, along with the quality of the work that you've just completed. The extremes of what this looks like are:

- This can be a 1.5-2-year process if you're a very dedicated filmmaker with goals to distribute your work as one aspect of building your career. Festival presence is an important aspect of becoming an independent filmmaker / artist, can influence a career in directing and commercial work, and promote the presence of a studio that has made the work.
- This could be anywhere from weeks to months, if you're just curious and want to give it a try as a new animation filmmaker / artist.
- The content and outcome of your project will provide you with some feedback about how festival curators are interested or not. This may influence your decision to keep applying to festivals, to better focus the festivals you apply to, or to shorten this distribution activity. No matter what, don't be discouraged. It's just a normal and realistic aspect of putting our projects into the world.

Why 2 years?

The festival lifespan of a film is up to 2 years from when you start the festival circuit. The very first time your film appears at a festival is the film's **premiere date** in the film world. The 2-year length is considered to be the time it takes for your film to have made its rounds and had its opportunity to be seen at all the festivals that would program it. Festivals will decline films that are older than 2 years from before the upcoming festival date.

Filmmakers/companies that include the copyright date at the end of released films show the year when it was released publicly.

Can I have my film available to watch online when applying to festivals?

Major festivals: NO

Medium festivals: MAYBE

Small festivals: PROBABLY, YES

Festivals are very particular about this aspect, and some will refuse to include your film if there has been any online presence. After all, this is WHY people come to the festivals, which is to see work that they can't see otherwise.

If your plan is to have a career that includes more filmmaking and festivals, you need to take this aspect very seriously.

Once your film has finished its "festival circuit" time, it's acceptable to have your film up online for everyone in the world to see.

But how will my friends and family see it?

You can create a password protected version on Vimeo (the online service that's preferred by festivals), or another media service platform.

3. Your Own Resource Needs

You'll need a few things to support this process.

- **Digital file of your film, different versions**
 - a high quality file that is uploaded to Vimeo (usually) and password protected for festival application access
 - a high quality file for screening (usually Quicktime H264 or Quicktime Apple Pro Res) See our [Dynamic Media Grad Info Hub info on Technical Standards](#) for a full profile.
- A "**Press Kit**" of the information about your film. Our 4th year animation students create this, so we have full information on what this entails in our [Dynamic Media Grad Info Hub](#)
- A **PASSPORT**, if you want to travel internationally. Have an up-to-date passport so you can travel with your film. This can take a long time to process, so get started early if you don't already have one.
- **Online Application process needs include**
 - **internet, computer**
 - **credit card or PayPal** to pay for application fees. Festival application sites (almost all major and medium festivals require this now) credit card to purchase their site's tokens that are used for each festival application that has a fee
 - **Vimeo** (possibly) hosting your film, password protected
 - Use of a number of Festival Application Services

4. Festival Application Sites

What are they?

Festival Application Sites are used for researching festivals and applying to them. Most festivals require that you apply using the site of their choosing.

How do I know which ones to use?

- There quite a few sites, but you only need to start using one if a festival requires that you use that particular service. You'll discover that many other festivals are also using that service. Once your material is loaded into that site, you can use it across all of the festivals that use that site's service.
- It is very rare that one site service will cover all of the festivals you want to apply to, so be prepared to repeat this account creation process a few times.
- Application sites often have a specific area of the world that they focus on, and a few are international.

Costs?

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- Festival application sites usually don't charge you anything to create your film's profile.
- A small application fee is incurred when you apply to a festival that's requiring a fee. Festival fees can be avoided if choosing to apply only to festivals without fees, but many of the important and major festivals have fees.
- There is usually a small service cost each time you apply to a festival

Samples of commonly used festival application service site

FestHome <http://www.festhome.com>

International festivals; online debit/credit card or PayPal

FilmFreeway <https://filmfreeway.com/>

North American, international; major festivals use this; North American currency and Euros

Some festival RESEARCH sites

These sites help you to sort out various factors, or just provide a focused list of animation-specific or animation-friendly festivals.

[Animation Festivals](#) An excellent listing service that is in current use, up-to-date, and provides festivals listed by deadlines for application; you can search for festivals using many different criteria, like country and what the festival accepts (like shorts or features).

[Global Animation Syndicate: Best Animation Festivals List](#): A good animation festival list and a short guide on how to apply to festivals. This is from 2019.

[Film Festival Life](#): A truly comprehensive festival list, but is a bit old.

Animation and Film Festivals within Canada

Below are a selection of Canadian film festivals worth submitting to, and research will reveal more festivals available to you as a student and after.

- [Vancouver International Film Festival](#) – mixed, general
- [DOXA Documentary Film Festival](#) – documentary (Vancouver festival)
- [Ottawa International Animation Festival](#) - animation
- [Giraf](#) – animation (Toronto)
- [Images Festival](#) – mixed; Has a strong artistic focus (Toronto)
- [Reel Asian Film Festival](#)– mixed; exclusively Asian produced and subjects (Toronto)
- [Out On Screen Film Festival](#) - mixed; exclusively LGBTTTQ* content and productions
- [Toronto International Film Festival](#) - mixed
- [TIFF Next Wave Festival](#) - mixed
- [The Animation Festival of Halifax](#) - animation
- [SPARK](#) – animation (Vancouver festival)
- [Montreal Stop Motion Festival](#) - animation

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- [Animaze Montreal International Animation Film Festival](#) - animation
- [Calgary International Film Festival](#) - mixed
- [Festival du nouveau cinéma](#) - mixed
- [Antimatter](#) – mixed; media as art
- [Toronto Animation Showcase](#) - animation
- [Toronto Animation Arts International](#) – animation
- [Vancouver International Women in Film Festival](#) -mixed; female-made and subject focus
- [Winnipeg Aboriginal Film Festival](#) – Indigenous, aboriginal produced content and subject matter
- [World's Smallest Animation Festival](#) - animation

Major, International Organizations for Filmmaking and Their Awards

These two organizations reflect what many consider to be the "top" of Western mainstream filmmaking careers, and they have student categories for their annual awards. You can apply with your student film because they each are open to international application. Many students that have received these awards go on to develop significant careers in mainstream media.

[Student Academy Awards](#): an international competition, and how to apply.

[Yugo BAFTA Student Awards](#): an international competition, and how to apply.

5. How do I choose?

How do I know what festivals to apply to? There are so many!

There are many different kinds of media and festivals, and these are tied to what your goals and situations are. The following topics cover some practical and preference-based guidelines.

FEES, and some strategies

Application fees range from FREE all the way up to \$50 - \$100. It's easy enough to apply to free festivals, while fee-based festivals should be given more consideration.

Early Bird Application fees: ALWAYS try to apply during this time if the festival is charging a fee. The fees are a lot lower the earlier you apply. Almost all fests do this early application time.

Litmus Test, Level 1: If there is an entry fee above \$25, determine if it's worth it. Ask yourself these questions:

- Do you have the money to spend?
- Do you have a good chance of getting in based on the quality of your film?
 - This point isn't meant to be rude, it's just practical. If you've been applying and have not been accepted, it might be an indication of the quality of your work in relation to what they will accept. Or, it could also be that you haven't selected the right types of festivals for your type of film.
- Make sure they accept the kind of film you made. Is there a category that your film fits into? Do you see previous festival years that include films like yours? (shorts, animation, experimental,

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narrative, etc). Don't apply if they don't screen your type of film! For example, if you make short experimental animation, and it's a documentary festival, don't apply.

- Is this the type of festival where your film stands a good chance of being noticed? If you have a short animation, and the festival is primarily catering to live-action narratives, then even if your film is accepted it is not going to be in Competition with other animation, and will likely be used more like "filler" in front of a feature.

Litmus Test, Level 2

- Is this an amazing top-tier festival that you actually stand a chance of getting into? If yes, then maybe the fee is worth it because of potential awards, networking, visibility, etc.. At the very least, having it on your filmography (CV for filmmakers) is an achievement.
- Do they have a competition with cash prizes? (If your film wins an award, you have a chance of getting that fee money back)
- Is this an important festival that places your film in front of an audience that you want to reach? (top-tier, special interest)
- Is this an Oscar Qualifying festival? This means that if you win an award, it helps fulfill the requirements to be considered for an Oscar.

RESEARCH the TYPES of FESTIVALS, and WHAT THEY SCREEN

It will benefit you if you research festivals and can identify ones that suit your purposes. This includes the type that promote your kind of film and the audience you're looking for.

Type of media includes: animation, live-action, documentary, and possibly installation and performance. Don't apply to a festival that doesn't indicate your area.

Student films? Some festivals are friendly to student work and even include this as a Competition category. This is ideal, because your film can be considered for awards, and not be in direct competition with professional and experienced independent studio-produced shorts.

Categories and Genres: When you apply to a festival, you are always **applying to a category, and identifying a genre.**

- **Categories:** includes shorts, features, documentary, and animation as the basics, but each festival may have fewer or more. For example, some festivals only screen shorts or features. Some do not screen animation.
- **Genres:** examples include Drama, Horror, Action, Musical. These are a clear indication of what the festival will screen and what they won't.

Special Interests and Themes: Some festivals have a special interest focus, like the environment, social justice, indigenous topics, and more. Do not ignore these, and do not apply if your film doesn't fit into their interest or theme.

LEVELS OF IMPORTANCE

Festivals are seen in terms of their ranking of importance and influence in the filmmaking world. When you start your festival applications, there can be a strategy to how you approach this.

The general idea is that within the limited 2 year festival life of your film, aim for the best, top-tier festivals first, and work your way down to the medium and small festivals. There are a few reasons for this.

PROFESSIONAL LEVEL

- Top-tier festivals like to have premieres of new work: World, national, regional, state
- Some top-tier festivals will only screen premieres. Short films aren't always held to the same rigorous restrictions as features are.
- Some top-tier festivals will not screen a film if a festival they are in competition with (regionally near, same tier) has screened it first.
- Your project is "hottest" when it's brand new. The people that want to buy, program or support your work are definitely attending these major festivals. They want to see work when its new so they can inquire about it first.

STUDENT LEVEL

- The same as professional festival experiences, your project is "hottest" when it's brand new, and after a year on the circuit it's has less potential for being in competition level.
- Aim for the top international festivals in your first efforts. Look up the deadlines, and see if there are any restrictions, such as screening at a competitive festival, or the requirement of "premieres only". After going through the top-tiers, then it's time to focus on the mid-level and smaller tier fests.

Not all top-tier festivals are accessible to your film. Top-tier festivals have strong regulations on what they screen, and you'll need to discern if they're open to student shorts. For example, a student animation short is not likely to be screened at the [Toronto International Film Festival \(TIFF\)](#), but would certainly be considered for Shorts Competition at the [Utrecht KaBoom Festival](#).

Again, it's up to you to research. This includes looking at festival listing sites, festival information, and asking experienced filmmakers their advice.

How do you know what's an "important" top-tier festival?

- That's easy! Do a web search for "most influential festivals" for your type of work (animation?) and you'll find all kinds of terrific lists. It sounds easy because it is.

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- “Academy qualifying” means Oscars, and is considered to be important by many. The British equivalent, the BAFTA, is also a biggie. Search for a list of qualifying festivals that have been approved of by the Academy or BAFTA. Your festival application service should list these.
- Student Academy Awards <http://www.oscars.org/saa/apply> are available to you as a student filmmaker! (FYI, the Academy tends to be limited to character-driven narrative animation.)
- Look at their website. Does it look posh and full of premieres, important filmmakers, awards, etc.?
- What is their presence within the filmmaking community?

Is it a "Second" or "Third Tier" festival?

Second or third tier refers to the festival being smaller in scope, money, staff, or that it might be relatively new and hasn't had time to reach notoriety. In general, these are (possibly) good festivals, but their resources and/or prestige are smaller.

- Look at the festival website and review what they screen, if there are awards, and even how it's reflected as a part of the local community
- Do some research and see what kind of coverage the festival receives in the film world.

6. What materials do I need?

PREPARING YOUR FESTIVAL MATERIALS

- Your finished film as digital file(s) in required festival format (standardized, but see the festival requirements)
- Application "Press Kit" Materials (see EC DM Grad Hub info)
- Promotional Materials, if you want them
- Subtitle file, a dialogue transcription, and possibly sound cues (if needed)
- Finances
- Festivals application services

Please refer to our [Emily Carr Dynamic Media Grad Info Hub](#) for **technical standards and guidelines** for video and audio.

Also refer to our [Hub](#) for [Press Kit guidelines and templates](#).

PRESS KIT

The Press Kit is a relatively standard package of materials used to advertise and represent your film.

These same materials are what are used when applying to festivals.

- Refer to our [ECU DM Grad Hub Info page on Press Kits](#) for in-depth information.
- [Look at 2 samples](#) in this course Dropbox folder.

A PRESS KIT INCLUDES:

- **"One Sheet"** with:
 - Contact Information (see "one sheet" section for more details)
 - Film Details
 - Log line (1-2 sentences)
 - Synopsis (Very short premise, doesn't include the ending)
 - Production Credits (all people that worked on the film)
 - Artist's Statement (about the project, first-person voice, up to 100 words)
 - Biography (about you, third-person voice, up to 100 words)
 - (there is a downloadable template for the One Sheet in our DM Grad Info Hub)
- **Director's Photo**, cropped to focus on the face
- **Film Production Stills**. These are used in programs, festival websites, publicity and advertising.

YOUR FINISHED FILM OUTPUT, READINESS

- Colour and luminance are all addressed for the purposes of having reviewed it in a colour-correction environment.
- Sound has been mixed and mastered so levels, qualities, channels are all addressed correctly to film standards.
- You've output a "master" file of uncompressed quality in order to use for creating other output qualities
- You've generated the variety of needed screening format versions and are ready to send them out

PROJECTION FILE FORMATS

What formats are needed for festival projection quality? It depends on the format you created your film in, and **the festival's own requirements**. Your film format is likely HD Widescreen, and this is able to be screened at all festivals.

Please refer to our [Emily Carr Dynamic Media Grad Info Hub](#) for technical standards and guidelines for video and audio.

GENERAL FORMATTING

- HD Widescreen
- 16:9 widescreen (also known as 1.77:1)
- 1920 x 1080 pixel height and width
- Frame Rate: 24fps
- Pixel ratio: 1.0 PAR (square pixel)
- Audio: 48kHz, 24-bit
- Audio mix is likely one of these: Stereo, LRC (left right centre), 5.1, 7.1

CONTAINER

QuickTime movie is a generally used "container" format. This is not compression, but a way to hold the file information.

Almost all festivals recognize this as a standard container format.

COMPRESSION

AppleProRes422 or H264

These are ways to compress your file, making it a smaller file size. The goal is to use a compression that reduces the file size while also maintaining highest quality.

- **Apple Pro Res** is a very good quality for film and animation, but makes a larger file size than H264.
- **H264** is accepted by most festivals, and allows for a high-quality output. H264 compression is NOT the same as selecting an H264 container. Be aware of what you're selecting when exporting.
- **Audio** is exported with 48kHz, 24-bit; The channel mix minimum goal is STEREO, but expect that festivals prefer LCR (left centre right), or 5.1, or 7.1.

DCP (Digital Cinema Protocol) packaged format. This is usually limited to top tier, big festivals.

- Our ECU Film and Animation technicians can support a DCP conversion of your film file if you request it. DCP creation requires specialty software and viewing environment.
- After graduation and working on your own films, a studio that creates the DCP for you will help you to format your film correctly.
- Requires delivery as a package of digital files, either online for download, or on a USB or a formatted harddrive with 3.0 USB or SATA output.
- Format: 2K widescreen resolution (2048 x 1152) or HD FULL (1998 x 1080)

7. Scheduling and Management

SCHEDULING

You **HAVE** to make a really top notch effort at this. This part is about keeping track of festival applications and what festivals are going to show your film.

GOOD SCENARIO: you're right on top of everything and send in your files on time, and your film is screened and the programmer is happy.

BAD SCENARIO: a festival has curated and scheduled your film, and you have not been reading your emails and have not delivered your projection file on time. The programmer is frantic and is trying to contact you. They cannot commit to programs and publicity until they have locked every film delivery in. They replace your film with something else because they have to move forward.

Use a **calendar** to track what you are required to deliver and who it is being sent to (email contact, possibly an upload link).

MANAGEMENT

- Keep your collection of files all together so you don't lose track of them.
- Have these files available through online access (in addition to archive backup in other locations).
- Create a doc that has file titles and download links for each one. You can easily copy-paste these when a programming team email-contacts you and asks for the files.
- Check your email regularly so you don't miss festival communication

8. Subtitles and Related Things

Please research online resources for more complete information and guidelines. Some guides are linked on the next page.

If you have dialogue in your film and want to have it screen in **other countries with other languages**, you will **have to** provide subtitle files and a dialogue transcription document. This won't be necessary if your film only plays in your own country and it uses the primary language spoken in your country.

1. Subtitles are provided for language translation. This is usually provided as a specialty file that is loaded with your film.
2. Captions are accessibility-related and include sound descriptions. This is usually provided as a specialty file that is loaded with your film.
3. A dialogue transcription, or dialogue script, is a text document that is made up of the character names and their dialogue for the entire film. The best kind is to create this out of the SRT file that you export after making your own subtitles. This file includes the timecode for each line of caption, and this will help a receiving festival to align their own translation subtitles.

When these are made: These files are created before you release the film to festivals.

Level of difficulty: easy-to-medium, depending on how much dialogue you have. The process is easy.

English is considered the "universal language". If your dialogue is English, you'll just need to create your files for English. If your dialogue is in another language, you will need to create subtitles in that language AND English.

Translations. Festivals in languages other than English will use the subtitle files you supply and deliver them to their festival transcription service. They will translate your subtitles to their language.

There are a LOT of Rules for Professional Broadcasting Subtitles and Closed Captions.

If your film will be at a festival, be SURE to read their guidelines about subtitle/caption requirements. You can refer to basic guidelines for cinema subtitles and accessibility captioning. Professional broadcast companies have vigorous guidelines that may go beyond what you need to attend to, but it doesn't hurt to look.

Consider the Capital Creations and Netflix guides (links below) for subtitling to learn about requirements that should influence how you create your subtitles for your student film. This can help you in interpreting

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dialogue performance, accents in speech and dialect, incorrect grammar, pauses, interruptions timing for jokes and humour, and more.

There are some significant differences between how Netflix and the BBC present their rules. Check them out!

[Capital Creations Caption Guidelines](#)

[Netflix Caption Guidelines \(English\)](#)

[BBC "How Do I Create Subtitles"](#)

[BBC Subtitle Guidelines](#)